

PROFESSIONAL BRETHREN

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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CHAPTER XVI.

KNOWING beyond doubt now the double dealing of both my master and Dr. Squires, I found myself sympathizing with Miss Stetson and almost unconsciously planning to save her from either one. It may seem a little strange that one of my character should find fault with anybody following the same line of business that had occupied my attention for half a lifetime and that I should begin to criticize my master for crimes that I had many times committed. I doubt very much if I should have troubled myself in this way had not Miss Stetson commanded my respect and confidence. She was too pure and good to fall a victim to such villains. There was a sacredness about her love for Mr. Goddard, even though it could never be consummated in marriage, which made her ten times more beautiful and lovely in my eyes. If such a love had been mine in early life, I should never have drifted away from my bright and honorable life.

She was not to marry him. That she had settled in her own mind, but she was consecrating her young life to him. The dread of the leper in him was an effectual barrier to their union, but she loved him none the less. Her pale face and sad, lustrous eyes revealed this even to me, and I blessed her for it. Her love was of a nobler type than the ordinary, but the pity of it was that my master was not worthy of it.

My feelings did not exactly undergo a transformation. Apart from his relationship with Miss Stetson, I still liked and admired my master. He was a skilled master in his profession, a man with many virtues and genial qualities, one whose kindness in the world had done much to make others happy. He was in reality my beau ideal of a criminal, a man who pursued his unlawful work without imbruing his own nature, a master of his profession and not a slave to it.

But when it came to a question of choosing between my master and Miss Stetson I unhesitatingly sided with the latter, one whose virtue was no less a powerful factor in attracting me than her utter helplessness in the hands of two such men.

Dr. Squires had enlisted my dislike from the first, and through varying degrees of feelings I had reached a climax in positive hatred for him. I would thwart him in his aim even though it compromised my master in the doing. I had convincing proof that he was all I ever imagined him to be.

I soon became a spy in the interest of Miss Stetson and in a sense a traitor to my master. This underhanded procedure displeased me, and several times I was on the point of applying for a position in the Stetson mansion. But this would remove me from the base of my supplies. I could not obtain the material so essential to conduct a successful warfare against the two men. I would have to play the traitor for a time at least—a role, be it said to my credit, that I never acted before.

I strove to make myself liked and trusted by her, for I knew that the day might come when it would be very important that she should believe in me and have confidence in my wisdom. Although nominally a mere butler, I knew that my master had praised me to her and had made her look upon me as something more than a common servant.

Meanwhile an accident that nearly proved fatal to her enabled me to increase my friendliness for me. While riding one of the horses which John said needed exercise, a feature of my old life as groom that I had not totally abandoned, this adventure occurred.

It was a quiet, peaceful morning, and I was entering down the highway thinking deeply of the strange circumstances which had so occupied my mind of late. I heard the clatter of feet in the distance, and as they seemed to approach rapidly and increase in volume I turned my head to see the cause. Down the old country road a horse was flying, throwing up clouds of dust and swaying the rider irregularly from left to right. I turned my horse and waited a moment to let the daring rider pass.

But as the running steed rapidly loomed up out of the showers of dust his feet were creating I saw that the rider had lost all control of the animal and was uncertainly retaining his seat in the saddle. A moment later my heart gave a little bound of fear when I realized that the rider was a woman and that woman Miss Stetson. She was unattended, and as often was in her morning rides, and along the old country road there was little chance of her attracting any one who could stop her.

The horse was rearing and snorting with the violence of his exertions, and the way he was rearing and snorting I knew that he was liable to cut up dangerous tricks to unseat his rider. As they approached within a few yards of me I caught a glimpse of the face of Miss Stetson. She was over her horse with a firm and determined expression, and her appealing eyes stirred up my latent power within me.

I let the raging horse pass, for any attempt to stop him short in his mad career would result in his flinging the rider to the ground. Then, whipping up my own horse, I started in pursuit. I shouted a few words of encouragement to Miss Stetson and bent myself to the task before me.

Fortunately I was mounted on the best animal in Mr. Goddard's stables, a powerful, nervy stallion. He seemed to enter into the spirit of the race in a moment, and with long, sweeping strides he slowly overtook the run-

away. Inch by inch and then foot by foot we overhauled the nearly spent horse ahead. The noise of a pursuing animal seemed to stimulate the runaway to renewed exertions at first, but it did not last long. I was soon within five feet of his tail; then my stallion's nose was even with it, and finally we galloped along just abreast of the crazy animal.

Again I spoke a few words to Miss Stetson, warning her to be prepared for any sudden swerve to the right. She could not look at me, but she grasped the pommel of her saddle with both hands. I saw that the reins had been broken and that they were dangling dangerously under her horse's feet.

Realizing that I could not check the runaway by grasping him by the bridle, I decided to make a desperate effort to dismount the rider. I told her as calmly as I could to disengage her feet from the stirrups, and when I gave her the word to throw her weight toward me.

Then, swinging my horse close up to the side of the runaway, so that for a moment my leg was jammed between their two bodies, I reached out my left arm and caught Miss Stetson by the waist. I knew what her animal would be likely to do, and I braced myself for a powerful effort.

As soon as the runaway felt the collision against his side he turned sharply to the left and ran into the gutter, where he stumbled and broke his leg. But as he swerved away from me, I was clung with all my might to the woman. She partly jumped, and I partly dragged her to the back of my own horse.

My own animal was so startled by this unexpected procedure that it was with difficulty that I checked his head. I partly dragged her to the back of my own horse.

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wounded horse.

CHAPTER XVII.

I WAS a hero in the eyes of Miss Stetson and my master after the runaway. Mr. Goddard was not less profuse in his congratulations and praise of me than the one I had saved from almost certain death. It pained me to see that his affection for her was genuine and yet not strong enough to induce him to give up his double life. I believe that if anything serious had happened to her he would have mourned for her as much as ever man did for woman. Nevertheless he continued to practice secretly a profession that would cause pain worse than death if she discovered it.

Realizing that matters were reaching a climax, I determined to make a bold stroke and try to induce my master to turn away from his evil ways. I had firm faith in him outside of his one weakness. If he was once confronted with his crimes and warned that an exposure would ruin him for life, he might relent. There was a possibility of saving him from himself and from the doctor's influence. I had the power within me to do it. I could face him and Dr. Squires with their crimes and threaten them with exposure if the latter did not immediately leave the place and the former promise to reform.

It might prove a risky experiment to permit such a man to marry a sweet, pure woman like Miss Stetson, but there was the possibility of a mutually happy union, while there would be nothing but misery and unhappiness for both if my master was arrested and punished for his crimes. Choosing what I considered the lesser of two evils, I decided to make the experiment.

A sense of honor still kept me from approaching my master and telling him all that I knew. I had given him my word that I would never mention meeting him in any other guise than that of a gentleman, or, in other words, our accidental meeting as common burglars was to be blotted from my mind unless we were thrown together again under similar circumstances.

I now determined to create those circumstances to suit my own purpose. Several days after this when I learned that he had an engagement at Dr. Squires' in the evening I made preparations to follow him again. This time I was posted so that I would not give him the opportunity to escape from me in the darkness.

It was a still, moonlight night. The moon came up about 11 o'clock, but the clouds in the heavens partly shut it from view. It cast wavering, vanishing shadows upon the calm earth which were exceedingly aggravating. They were so deceptive in appearance that I felt my task would be doubly difficult.

My master left the house at the usual time and proceeded to walk leisurely toward the doctor's. I followed him at some distance, not making any special effort to keep him in view. I knew that he was not anticipating any shadowing, and we both made our way to the old mansion according to our own notions.

I hurried a little toward the end of the walk to make sure that he entered the house. I reached a vantage point just in time to see the door open and close behind him. Then I amused myself the best way I could for several hours.

Shortly after midnight I roused myself to action. The time was approaching when I must prove my skill. The house was all dark, and no signs came from it to indicate the presence of a living soul anywhere around it. It was a full hour before the door opened. Then by the aid of the moon's white light I caught a glimpse of my master and the doctor. They were consulting together in the shadow of the porch. I saw the latter point down the road, but I could not understand anything he said.

A few moments later my master left him and glided rather than walked down the drive toward the highway. I waited for him, concealed in some bushes near the gate. His manner was quick, nervous, energetic—so unlike his natural habits. The professional burglar was aroused in him—a second self which had been carefully cultivated and developed.

We both moved down the highway cautiously, watching, listening and anticipating some unknown danger. I kept within ten yards of him, but always ready to increase the distance between us on the slightest sign from him that he intended to double upon his tracks. I was familiar with his tactics this time sufficiently to enable me to be prepared for the most unexpected movement.

Never did a detective shadow a criminal with more intensity than I did my master that night. He led me a chase two miles down the road; then without apparent reason he struck across the fields to one of the side roads which ran parallel with the main highway. A mile down this brought him to a fork in the road formed by the meeting of an old, deserted lane. Into this he turned his silent footsteps.

Five hundred yards down it a small, purring brook crossed the lane. It was too broad to jump over, but only a few feet deep. My master removed his shoes quickly and then plunged into the cool water, but instead of crossing he waded a long distance down stream and then regained the same shore again. I understood his maneuver. It was to throw bloodhounds off the track and to confuse any detective who might try to trace him back to the doctor's house.

I smiled at the trick and waited quietly for him to replace his shoes. Then once more he started on his journey. This time he ceased to pursue a zigzag course, but made a bee line for a large house not a hundred yards from the brook. This I knew was the scene of his night's work.

The house was a modern one and stood on a slight eminence overlooking the surrounding country. It was owned by an intimate friend of the Stetson and Goddard families—Mr. Jaimson by name—and it occurred to me as being very peculiar that my master

should attempt to rob it. But what could not be expected of him after he had looted the Stetson house, the very home of the one whom he loved? Could such baseness be ever overlooked? Could such a man be reformed? For a few moments my resolutions wavered, and I thought of returning and telling all that I knew to Miss Stetson and let her decide the fate of the two men.

But a moment later I found myself pursuing my game with renewed animation. He had actually entered the house through one of the basement windows. I waited a reasonable length of time before following him. Then when everything was quiet I climbed through the window at the risk of my own life, for I realized that my form was silhouetted against the outside light, while my master might be hidden in the darkness inside.

But I gained the interior of the basement without accident. I searched around for an open door, and finding it I walked catlike into a larger room. I knew that my master's first point would be the dining room, and I boldly climbed the stairs leading to it from the basement. Once there I heard the slight rattle of silver and caught the quick, flashing ray of his dark lantern. When I concealed myself behind some curtains and waited.

I decided that it would be better to let him finish his job and then confront him with his booty in his hands. There would then be no question of his intentions.

He passed from the dining room into the library and then moved silently upstairs. In spite of his soft steps and quiet motions I could occasionally catch a sound which indicated to me where he was. If anybody had been awake, his presence would have been detected.

I kept myself pretty well concealed behind some curtain or portiere, for I dreaded lest at any moment he might flash the rays of his lantern in my direction and detect me. I was thus concealed from view in a small alcove opening upon the upper hall when I was startled by a peculiar noise.

As a professional burglar myself I knew the alarming nature of that sound. It was the distinct click of a revolver. I peered through the curtain to determine what it meant. As I did so there was another click, this time lower and less distinct. This was caused by the pressing of an electric button. The next moment the whole house was brilliantly lighted.

I stopped back into the alcove with trembling heart. The inmates of the house had been aroused, and my master as well as myself was caught. Through the filmy curtains I caught a glimpse of a dark shadow flash through the hall toward the front stairs. I knew that it was my master and that he was making a bold dash for freedom.

At almost the same moment I heard a door open and a loud voice exclaim: "Stop or I'll shoot!"

I imagined that my master did not obey, for the next moment two pistol shots rang through the house, followed by the loud shuffling of feet and the banging of doors.

Had a tragedy been enacted within sound of me or had my master escaped? I waited and listened, expectantly and anxiously. The people of the house were evidently assembled in the hall below. They were too frightened to do much talking. Then matters calmed down a little, and I caught snatches of their conversation.

"The basement window was opened," somebody said. "He jumped out of that."

"Didn't you hit him, father?" asked a youthful voice which I recognized as that of the seventeen-year-old son of Mr. Jaimson.

"I don't know. Do you see any signs of blood in the basement?" They went down another flight of stairs, and I would have made a bold dash for liberty then had not the presence of some of the frightened servants in the upper hall prevented me.

Half an hour later they returned upstairs. Fortunately for me no thought of a search for another burglar entered their minds. Mr. Jaimson tried to calm the servants and the ladies by saying:

"Now all go to bed again. There is no more danger. He has left the house, and we are safer than ever. A burglar never enters a house the second time."

Gradually they separated and returned to their bedrooms. Only the old man and his wife remained in the hall within my hearing. When everything was quiet again, he said:

"Ellen, I recognized the burglar to-night beyond doubt."

"Why, Edward, who was he?" his wife asked quickly.

"You will hardly believe me, Ellen, when I tell you, but it is true. I could not have been mistaken."

Then he lowered his voice and said: "It was Charles Goddard!" "Impossible, Edward; impossible! You were excited and could not see well."

"No, Ellen, there was no mistake. I faced him in the hall and could have shot him dead. But the surprise at meeting him moved me. Then I merely tried to wound him and not to kill him when he rushed downstairs."

It was still early in the morning when I dressed and knocked at my master's door. He was sleeping soundly, and I disliked to rouse him. But I was fearful lest he had been wounded the night before, and I could not leave the house on the mission I had in view until I had ascertained. I shoved his bedroom door open and entered (he never locked it at nights and asked him if he wished anything.

"No, William; not yet," he replied in a sleepy voice. "I am very tired this morning and shall not get up until lunch time. Have a good lunch for me, and I will be ready."

His face was pale, but not more so than usual after his night visits to Dr. Squires.

"There is nothing wrong with you this morning, I hope?" I ventured to remark.

"No, William, except that I'm very weary and sleepy. Why do you ask?" He looked inquiringly at me, and I stammered:

"Nothing, only you look pale. I thought maybe you were ill."

"No, I'm not sick—merely tired. Leave me for a few hours."

I closed the door softly, satisfied that he was unharmed. After giving directions to the servants about an early lunch for my master I left the house and started on a brisk walk toward Mr. Jaimson's house. It was essential that I should have an interview with him before he saw the previous night's robbery.

He was at breakfast when I was ushered into the library. I insisted upon seeing him alone and immediately, urging the servant to report that my business was very important.

Ten minutes later he appeared in the library. He was a man past middle age, stout of figure and stern of feature. I realized that he was a man not easily turned from any course which he considered just. He bowed stiffly upon entering and said:

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, I believe."

I was dressed in a new suit of clothes, and I flattered myself that I would pass for a gentleman among strangers.

"No, sir, but that is not necessary," I said briskly and with the air of one of authority. "I have come to talk with you about last night's robbery."

He started visibly and then said smilingly:

"Ah, I see! You're a detective!" "I have no direct reply to this, but added:

"I think the robbers who have recently been terrorizing the neighborhood will soon be cornered."

He smiled again and said: "Possibly. I know something about it that may lead to important results."

"I know that," I answered, "and that is why I have come thus early to see you."

"How do you know it?" he responded. "That isn't the point. I not only know that you know a good deal about it, but I know exactly the information that leads you to think you can expose the robbers."

He looked inquisitively at me and then said frowningly:

"What is it that I know or that you think I know?"

I looked around the room as if I expected somebody might be listening. "We are alone," he said shortly.

"You recognized the burglar last night before you shot at him," I said impressively.

He gave a startled look at me and stammered:

"What do you tell me—has my wife told anybody—that was the only one—"

"Never mind that," I replied, waving my hands. "I know. That is sufficient for my present purpose."

"Ah, I see! You're a detective!" A look of suspicion entered his face, and, probably thinking that I was merely leading him on, he asked:

"If you know so much about it, please tell me who it was I recognized."

"Certainly. I'll whisper it in your ear."

I drew near to him and said impressively: "It was Charles Goddard whom you recognized in your house last night and at whom you shot."

The last expression of doubt left his face, and he could only add slowly: "Well, well, I don't understand how you found it out."

The man was completely mystified, as I hoped he would be, and I continued with a smile on my own face: "Now, if you believe that I know what I'm doing we will enter into the details of my mission here this morning."

"Go on. I'm ready for anything." "First, then, what did you intend to do with this information?" "I hadn't made up my mind," he said doubtfully, taking a seat in an easy chair near me.

My wife, and she's seen nobody but the servants." "But other eyes may have recognized the man," I said suggestively. "That's true. I never thought of that. Odd some of my servants see him."

"Don't worry yourself," I interrupted. "The person who saw him will not mention it further. I've fixed all that."

"Well, well; so early in the morning, and you seem to have arranged everything before I could decide upon the first step."

"It's my business," I added. Then continuing I said in a low voice: "But Mr. Goddard is not the only one concerned in these robberies. There is another and I think a more dangerous neighbor who is implicated in the crimes. But he is too wary to be caught easily. He directs the whole matter, but keeps in the background. He must be caught at last and punished if Mr. Goddard is to suffer. It would be a sin to let him escape and the lesser criminal punished."

"Yes, yes, of course—by all means." "Then we must work together. I've laid a plan by which I can prove the guilt of this other party. If you will work with me and do as I tell you, we can face him with his guilt in spite of all his skillfulness."

"Anything that you think best. Propose your plan."

"Well, first, I want you to keep the matter strictly quiet and not mention to a living soul that you recognized the burglar last night. Let the detectives work on the case as usual, but warn your wife not to commit herself. Is she brave enough to do this?"

"Yes; Ellen is only too ready to shield Mr. Goddard. I cannot convince her that I was correct in recognizing him."

"So much the better. Let her continue to think so and pretend that you think you might have been mistaken. Then next Tuesday night I shall ask you and another person who is more interested in Mr. Goddard than yourself—Miss Stetson, in short—to accompany me to one of your neighbor's houses. He will be away that night, and I will show you some of the secrets of his little game that he conceals in his house. When he returns late at night, we can confront him with the crime. I shall then leave it with you and Miss Stetson as to what course to pursue. If we arrest the man, Mr. Goddard will have to be implicated; if we banish him from the place with the threat of exposure, we can shield Mr. Goddard and give him another chance. That, in short, is my plan. Will you co-operate with me?"

"With pleasure. It's an admirable arrangement. I believe we ought to give Charles another opportunity. I can hardly find the heart to have him arrested."

"Well, I leave that entirely to you and Miss Stetson."

"And Miss Stetson will agree with me."

I said nothing in reply, but after giving a few more directions I withdrew, promising to call for him on the evening specified to conduct him to the house of his unknown neighbor.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH the danger of exposure of my master removed, I returned home with a lighter heart. I reached there in time to have the lunch served to him.

He had not noticed my absence, and I congratulated myself upon a shrewd piece of work. I had at last determined to bring matters to a climax.

It was two days after this before I got the opportunity to call upon Miss Stetson. I wanted to redeem her promise made on the day of her horseback accident.

I had learned through an accident that Dr. Squires would be away on Tuesday and that he would not return until late at night. I did not know what his mission was or where he was going. All that concerned me was that he would be absent and the house would be left in charge of his old servant.

It was the knowledge of this that made me anxious to appoint Tuesday for the little experiment I had in mind.

When I reached the Stetson mansion, I was informed that Miss Stetson was engaged. The servants knew me by this time, and while they did not exactly treat me as one of their number they did not accord me all the courtesy due a gentleman. I was told to take a seat until the person who was with Miss Stetson had gone.

My name was not even carried up to her, but I was too much preoccupied with my thoughts to resent this incivility, and I made the most of it by taking a comfortable seat in the waiting room. This room opened right off the front parlor, and just back of that was the library.

For some time I remained seated there busily occupied with my own thoughts, but as time passed I became restless and anxious to make a change. Not hearing any voices, I rose from my seat and walked quietly into the parlor to look at some of the beautiful pictures hanging on the walls. This library, I knew, Miss Stetson would not resent.

As I stepped into the parlor I heard the sound of voices proceeding from the library. I would have retreated to the waiting room if the voice of Dr. Squires had not arrested my attention. I could not resist the temptation to listen to him, for, knowing what he was, I thought anything was fair enough for him, and I played the eavesdropper.

The portieres between the parlor and library were drawn, and through their thick folds I could just catch the words of the two. The first words of the doctor informed me that I had reached the place at a critical moment.

"Miss Belle, you do me injustice to say that I do not like pleasant surroundings and that I am not like other men in my tastes. No man appreciates a home more than I do."

"I did not mean to insinuate that, doctor," Miss Stetson replied. "I merely said that I thought it so strange you should like to live in that old deserted, haunted mansion."

"I do not like to live there. It was not a matter of choice with me. I was poor and had to in order to carry out my experiments."

"But couldn't you find more congenial quarters without going to any expense?"

"No—that is a note that would suit my purpose."

There was a short pause, then the doctor continued: "But, Miss Belle, my time in the old haunted mansion is short. I'm anxious to leave it. My fortune has improved, and I shall seek better quarters."

"Has your discovery proved successful so that you can realize some money on it?" she asked eagerly.

"No, not exactly that," he stammered. "But I have been fortunate in another way. A distant relative has died and left his money to me. It is not much, but enough to keep me in comfort for the balance of my life. It will amount to about \$100,000."

"Indeed! I'm so glad to hear it, doctor. Nobody will congratulate you more heartily than I, for I think you deserve it."

"It is kind of you to say it," he said slowly. "But there is one other thing necessary to complete my happiness."

Another pause followed in which I could imagine their exchange of looks.

"I would not mention this, Miss Belle, if I did not have your own word for it that you would never marry Charles," the doctor began again in a labored voice. "But when you told me that you would not marry him I thought that there was no longer any reason why I should curb my own love for you. Miss Belle, I loved you before that, and I love you now. I am no longer poor; I'm not rich, but I'll have a competency enough for both of us. If you love me, and your love alone will make me happy."

I trembled more than the doctor had caught the reply.

"Please don't talk to me like that, doctor," she said in a voice that had a piteous ring to it. "It is impossible."

"Why impossible? Nothing is impossible," he answered fiercely. "I've learned to believe that anything can be accomplished if we but will it. Why can you not love me and marry me?"

"You do not understand, doctor. Please do not mention it again. It is very hard for me to say this."